

ARTICLE APPEARED
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THE BALTIMORE SUN
10 July 1981

Rowny opts for A-arms equality

By Charles W. Corddry
Washington Bureau of The Sun

Washington—Gen. Edward L. Rowny, nominated as chief arms-control negotiator, told the Senate yesterday that new agreements with the Soviet Union must substantially cut the nuclear explosive power on each side—a proposal that dramatizes the tough times ahead in negotiating with Moscow.

What the general outlined was a plan that would not just limit the numbers of missile launchers and bombers in each arsenal but would demand equality in nuclear megatonnage, in which Russia now is much superior.

In his preview of Reagan administration negotiating positions, General Rowny also indicated the time is fast approaching when it will be necessary to have on-site inspections to verify compliance with strategic arms limitation agreements.

"This will be increasingly difficult to achieve in the future solely through national technical means," he told his confirmation hearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee's arms-control subcommittee. "National technical means" is a euphemism for spy satellites.

Unable to agree on on-site inspections up to now, the United States and the Soviet Union count on their own satellites to check on compliance.

The foreign relations panel, somewhat miffed by indications the administration is approaching arms negotiations slowly, got a declaration from General Rowny that he would be "no stumbling block." On confirmation, he said, he would assemble a negotiating team and be ready for talks "as soon as instructions are given to me" by President Reagan.

Indications within the administration, however, are that it still will be about nine months before there can be serious talks on strategic arms with Moscow.

The nine-month estimate originated

the panel when it was given in confirmation hearings by Eugene V. Rostow, the new director of the U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency. Mr. Rostow at length indicated the administration would try to be ready sooner. General Rowny, as chief arms-control negotiator, will report to Mr. Reagan through Mr. Rostow.

In his testimony yesterday, the general was no less positive than other top officials on the need to build up American nuclear power as a pre-condition for successful negotiations with Moscow.

Questioned by Senator Alan Cranston (D. Calif.), the Senate minority whip, General Rowny stated unequivocally that Russia had surpassed the United States in strategic nuclear power and that this judgment had been reached by the U.S. military high command. He said: "We have a condition of Soviet strategic superiority at the present time."

Either Russia can cut back, which is quite unlikely, or the United States can build up to induce the Soviets to see the "folly" of the race, he said.

General Rowny has longer experience in negotiating with Moscow on nuclear arms limits than any other official. He served on the American delegation from 1973 to 1979, and then quit the delegation and retired from the Army because he could not back the SALT II treaty.

The negotiating position he described

yesterday was aimed at overturning what he saw as the main inequality of SALT II—the overwhelming advantage in nuclear destructive potential allowed the Soviets by a putatively equal agreement.

The SALT II agreement, set aside by Washington after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, set limits on numbers of missile launchers, bombers, and warheads that can be carried on individual missiles. Soviet rockets are bigger than those of the U.S. and thus have greater throw weight or capacity for nuclear explosive power.

"Equality in agreements does not mean equal numbers of launchers [missiles and bombers] alone," General Rowny said, "but also means equality in the destructive potential of the weapons themselves."

At another point, he put it this way: "Throw-weight or number of warheads provide more meaningful yardsticks of true strategic capabilities than the mere numbers of launchers."

When it was pointed out to him that the U.S. has more strategic nuclear warheads (9,000) than Russia (7,000), General Rowny said the Russians, however, have three times as many on land-based missiles, the big ones threatening American intercontinental rockets. He would be "happy to trade off" some of America's numbers to get substantial cuts in Soviet throw-weight.

The Russians must be convinced that the United States means to "restore parity," General Rowny said.